

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 BELGRADE 000232

SIPDIS

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SR](#) [MW](#) [YI](#)

SUBJECT: Ensuring Stability in Southern Serbia

REF: 05 Belgrade 2321

#### Summary

1. We are working to ensure that local political developments in the three Southern Serbia municipalities with ethnic Albanian populations (Presevo, Bujanovac, and Medvedja) do not undermine progress that has been made in stabilizing this sensitive area bordering Kosovo. Our strategy for the coming months includes both positive incentives and clear warnings for a newly ascendant group of local ethnic Albanian leaders, who have threatened to stress nationalist pan-Albanian themes (e.g., Southern Serbia as Eastern Kosovo) in the coming months. In addition to keeping local leaders on the right script and managing our substantial assistance funds, we will continue to press Belgrade to fund and otherwise support a renewed effort by the Minister of Human and Minority Rights to reinvigorate the government's Coordinating Body for Southern Serbia (CB) and to address the region's persistent political and economic problems. End Summary

#### Local Politics in South Serbia Heat Up

2. A successful recall election of the long-time Mayor of Presevo in November 2005 removed Riza Halimi, a consistent supporter of cooperation with Belgrade through the CB and one of our closest collaborators since 2001 (reftels). As a consequence the firebrand head of the Presevo Assembly Ragmi Mustafa, took over as interim Mayor until local elections scheduled for July (special elections for Southern Serbia alone were held in 2002). Mustafa and another local leader in his coalition, Jonas Musliu, have in the past challenged the legitimacy of the Coordinating Body and called for more autonomy and for a special relationship with Kosovo. Mustafa and Musliu, strengthened by the results of the recall, led a successful drive early this year to adopt a Southern Serbian "Albanian Platform" for the Kosovo status talks.

#### Southern Serbia Platform on Kosovo

3. The platform, issued on January 14 and signed by 61 of the 66 Albanian representatives in the three local assemblies, steps over, in part, our well publicized red lines (no territorial links between Kosovo and Southern Serbia) by calling for more autonomy along the lines of the Serbian government's position on Kosovo and by advocating union with Kosovo in the event of its partition. The document (full text at para 9) notes the incomplete nature of political mechanisms in Southern Serbia and refers to a well publicized referendum in 1992 that called for the secession of Southern Serbia and its unification with Kosovo. On 2/13, Mustafa went arguably even farther, stating publicly: "If Kosovo is independent, then we shall, in keeping with the adopted platform, demand that we become part of that country," Mustafa said.

#### Warning on US Red Lines

4. Polcouns met privately with Mustafa and Musliu shortly after the adoption of the platform to warn them against crossing our red lines on Kosovo. Mustafa reassured us that he would cooperate with the Coordinating Body, and that he would limit his rhetoric on Kosovo during the campaign for local elections in Southern Serbia. He said he understood fully the distinction between being an opposition leader and being head of the local Presevo government; he would not be shortsighted enough to endanger badly needed funds from the Serbian government and looked forward to participating in the inauguration of our local assistance projects. Musliu sheepishly told us he had only pushed the platform to help his "brothers" in Kosovo, not to complicate things in Southern Serbia. Our bottom line message: words matter and we will take a firm stand against irresponsible campaigning focused on Kosovo instead of on real problems within Serbia.

#### Working with Ljajic

5. Over the next several months we will work closely with the head of the Coordinating Body and Minister for Human and Minority Rights Rasim Ljajic, the OSCE, and with the Austrian EU Presidency to encourage the government and local leaders to avoid controversy and sensationalism and to focus on practical efforts to resolve long standing

problems. Ljajic has already moved quickly this year to jump start the moribund CB in Southern Serbia but so far mostly with words; concrete deliverables are still lagging. Following noticeable press coverage in the Serbian media of Mustafa and Musliu's "consultations" with Kosovo leaders on the platform (and negative responses from Belgrade), Ljajic took pains to play down the controversy surrounding the political platform (he told us he is not worried about Mustafa and Musliu). While he did qualify much of the content of the platform as "unacceptable" in private meetings first with us, the EU Presidency and the OSCE (we have assembled an informal monitoring and support group for Southern Serbia), and days later with most of the European Diplomatic community, he did not dwell on the issue. Instead, he focused on his engagement plans for the coming year (e.g., the creation of new CB working groups and the establishment of a new GOS Southern-Serbia/Kosovo economic team) and introduced new senior staff, including representatives from the DS and the DSS who will help implement the program.

16. According to Ljajic, almost one-third of the funds set aside for the Coordinating Body last year were reprogrammed after the Finance Ministry failed to spend the money by the end of the year. Ljajic says this was deliberate on the part of the GoS, as there has been a long list of unfunded requests pending with the Ministry for some time. He believes that the several million dollars the Ministry made available at the end of the year for Southern Serbia were the result of pressure from the U.S. (Ambassador raised it with PM Kostunica and DPM Labus in October and November) and has asked us to help early and at a high level to avoid any similar loss of funding this year. Ljajic appears to have been the organizing force behind a mid-January meeting between PM Kostunica and the three Southern Serbian mayors (including Mustafa) and, encouragingly, has also noted the need to reassure the local Serbian community in the three municipalities about the platform and their concerns.

#### Way Ahead

17. While we will work with Ljajic, we have discouraged him on one front: an idea he floated for a "low level" donor's conference for Southern Serbia. He seems to have taken our concerns (bad timing given Kosovo and other international crises) on board; he downplayed the idea in his larger meeting with European representatives. Our assistance program for 2006 will focus on three fronts: finishing a crucial secondary road from Bujanovac to the Macedonian border that will help as a platform for a wider range of business development initiatives; a series of smaller and carefully designed projects to reinforce progress in the CB; and some political support work aimed at deepening democratic capacity and encouraging pre-electoral coalition building among constructive local parties (Serb and Albanian).

18. With municipal elections due in June 2006 for Presevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja, we can expect that the Kosovo status discussions, particularly decentralization, will continue to be a theme in local politics. We will continue to prod the GOS to continue support to multi-ethnic institutions, as we remind the local Albanian community that their future is in a stable and secure Serbia.

19. BEGIN TEXT OF PLATFORM  
ALBANIAN COUNCILLORS OF PRESHEVA VALLEY (PRESHEVO,  
BUJANOVAC AND MEDVEDJA) IN MEETING HELD  
ON 14 JANUARY 2006 IN PRESHEVO

Being aware that the Albanian population of Preshevo, Bujanovac and Medvedja ( the Presheva Valley) is facing with the issue of its unresolved political status,

Committing to protection and development of Albanian national identity,

Committing to forms of all Albanian integration, as a part of trends for European and Euro-Atlantic integrations,

Taking into consideration that forms of territorial organization have not offered so far adequate possibilities for protection of interests of Albanians of the Presheva Valley,

Committing to unification and concentration of political power in resolving these issues,

Based on political activities up to nowadays and armed resistance of Albanians from this region,

Finding support for their requests in international documents (UN, OSCE, CE), that guarantee human and minority rights,

**I. PRINCIPLES:**

At the time when Kosovo has entered the most important phase for determination of its political-legal status and when the entire region of the Western Balkans aims for acceleration of process of Euro-Atlantic integrations, the Albanian political entities in Presheva Valley see a need for undertaking concrete and coordinated actions for resolution of the Albanian issue in this region in spirit with integration processes that are taking place in Europe,

Albanian councilors from Preshevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac, (hereinafter referred to as councillors), consider that as long as there is no right solution of the issue of Albanians from the Valley, the region will continue to remain a permanent hotspot and an obstacle to Euro-Atlantic integrations, Councillors request that the rights of Albanians of the Valley are guaranteed as a part of installing mechanisms of joint values for communities that make the absolute majority in certain parts of the region (Western Balkans), by committing to creating special links of the Presheva Valley with Kosovo,

In the spirit of these values by finding support in fundamental documents, which institutionalize protection of individual and collective rights, such as:

- UN Charter,
- Universal Declaration for Human Rights
- International Treaty for civil and political rights,
- International Treaty for economic, social and cultural rights
- European frame convention for minority rights,
- European convention for human rights and basic freedoms
- European charter for regional and minority languages,
- OSCE documents, such as:
  - Suggestions from Lund, Oslo and Hague,
  - Final Helsinki Act 1975
  - Paris Charter for New Europe 1990
  - Documents from Copenhagen human dimension,

**II SPECIAL REQUESTS:**

A just and sustainable solution of the issue of Presheva Valley means full respect for individual and collective rights of Albanians through a right solution of following issues:

Councillors consider that the Presheva Valley should have a form of administrative-territorial organisation with functions in field of judiciary, police, education, use of language and national symbols, health, economic and cultural development, local planning, environment, natural resources, housing issues, social services,

Decentralisation of power and transfer of competencies from central level to local and regional self-administration should take place as well as decentralisation of other institutions, especially of judiciary, should happen, by establishing:

District Court, Commercial Court, Minor Offences Council with territorial competencies for this region,

Full demilitarisation of the Presheva Valley and withdrawal of current bases and those that are under construction should take place,

Public security issues should be in exclusive competencies of multiethnic police and its commanding structures,

Economic development of the region through creation of favourable conditions for giving loans to small and medium enterprises, attraction of the foreign capital, establishment of business centres, creation of a Free Trade Zone and cross-border cooperation in projects with international donors,

Privatisation of the current social enterprises should take place by creating equal conditions for participation,

Education system in the Presheva Valley should be harmonised with the education system in Kosovo in conformity with European standards for education,

Proportional integration of Albanians in local structures of power and in all state and public institutions of all levels,

Official applying of Albanian language and alphabet in institutions of local self-administration, state and public

institutions of all levels,

Official and public use of national symbols of Albanians as well as the right for public celebration of important dates from national history,

Establishment of institutions for expression, preservation and advancing of cultural, informative, religious and traditional values specific for Albanians,

Creation of special institutions for social protection of the endangered group of population,

Development of current health institutions for primary health protection of population and creation of possibilities for secondary health protection of population of the Presheva Valley by building up an hospital for these municipalities,

Sustainable return of displaced population by reimbursing damages in their properties and development of road, health and education infrastructure,

Full respect of Law on Amnesty (Official Gazette of FRY Nr 37/2002 on 03.07.2002) for former members of UPMB and cessation of all court procedures set up against Albanians as well as release of political prisoners,

Intimidation campaign by sending summons for military service should stop,

Light should be shed on cases of murder of civilians in the period 1999-2001 that have happened in this region,

Adequate treatment of the Albanian Diaspora from this region by domestic institutions through protection of links of Diaspora with their birthplace, life, customs, language and culture as well as encouragement for investment of their capital in the region,

For the realisation of above-mentioned goals, Albanian political parties underline the need for creation of a joint representation body (National Council) as soon as possible.

### III FINAL PROVISIONS

By reconfirming the will of the population expressed in Referendum in 1992 for definition of the Presheva Valley as a special political, territorial-constitutional region, councillors, in support of the Principles of Contact Group related to Kosovo's status, are obliged to commit to unification of the Presheva Valley with Kosovo in case of lack of respect for these principles and possible change of Kosovo's borders.

FROM THE WORKING GROUP

END TEXT

MOORE